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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Department Offers Cold Weather Safety Tips

Eau Claire, Wisconsin – January 4, 2011 Winter in Wisconsin brings lot of fun outdoor activities such as skiing, snowmobiling, ice fishing, and sledding, but it also brings frigid cold temperatures. The Eau Claire City-County Health Department is urging people to take precautions against extreme cold.

"When temperatures plummet, those whose bodies cannot easily regulate their temperature, such as infants and the elderly, are at increased risk of hypothermia," said Richard Thoune, Eau Claire City-County Health Officer. "Hypothermia is a life-threatening condition that causes the body's core temperature to drop. Warning signs of hypothermia in adults include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness. Infants who are suffering from hypothermia may appear to have very low energy and bright red, cold skin."

Frostbite is another cold weather concern, and is especially dangerous because it often happens with little warning. Numbness can occur so quickly that the individual, unaware of being frostbitten, may remain outside, increasing the chance of permanent damage. Older persons, and those with diabetes, are especially vulnerable to frostbite because of impaired circulation.

Frostbite occurs in three stages. First-degree frostbite usually causes a whitening of the skin, followed by redness, tingling and loss of feeling. In second-degree frostbite, the skin turns purple and blisters begin to form. Third degree frostbite, which affects those subjected to severe exposure, can lead to gangrene and amputation. Snowmobilers, skiers and ice skaters should stop frequently to check exposed areas of their body for loss of feeling and other danger signs.

To prevent frostbite and hypothermia, people should be sure to:

- Dress warmly in windproof clothing
- Go indoors when you begin to feel cold
- Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothing to trap body heat
- Fasten buttons or zippers and tighten drawstrings securely
- Don't forget gloves, mittens and a hat that covers the ears
- Be aware of the effects of wind chill. As the speed of wind increases, it can carry heat away from the body faster. In high wind conditions, cold weather-related health problems are much more likely. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven to reduce body-heat loss caused by wind.

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Since cold weather puts an extra burden on the heart, if you have cardiac problems or high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders about shoveling or performing any strenuous exercise outside. Even otherwise-healthy adults should remember that their bodies already are working overtime just to stay warm, and dress appropriately and work slowly when doing heavy outdoor chores.

Keep in mind that alcoholic beverages cause the body to lose heat more rapidly. If you will be spending time outside, do not ignore shivering - it is an important first sign that the body is losing heat and a signal to quickly return indoors.

For more tips on staying safe and healthy during cold weather, visit the message of the day at www.BeReadyEC.com.

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